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AUTHOR Bond, Carole L.; Dietrich, Amy
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ABSTRACT

Surveys regarding attitudes toward special education were completed by 1,232 regular classroom teachers in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi. Analysis was performed on survey responses and measures of teachers' experience, level of education, number of special education courses taken, class size, number of special education students in the class, attitude toward those students, school size and location, and grade level taught. Significant relationships were found between attitudes toward the special education resource program and attitudes toward special education students. In addition, four factors were significantly related to the special education resource program: number of years of teaching experience, number of special education children assigned to the classroom, coursework in special education, and school location. Over 20% of the attitudes toward the special education resource programs measured in the survey were negative. (CL)

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Regional Survey of Teacher Attitudes
Toward Special Education Resource Programs *

Carole L. Bond, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
Memphis State University
Memphis, Tennessee 38152

Amy Dietrich, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Special Education & Rehabilitation
Memphis State University
Memphis, Tennessee 38152

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Memphis State University.

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ABSTRACT

With the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 now in force, classroom teachers have to be able to effectively teach in classrooms which contain children who have been mainstreamed from special education programs. In order to be effective the classroom teacher must have a positive attitude toward the special education child as well as the special education resource program. Research done by Bond and Dietrich suggests that those positive attitudes do not exist. Furthermore, they found that those teachers who had taken at least one special education class had more positive attitudes than those with no course work in special education.

Special Education services have become very much a part of our every day school program, especially since the implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142). With over three million special education students with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities enrolled in our school systems, a special education resource program, designed to support the mainstreamed special education student, is extremely important. Even though these programs can provide services that are generally beyond the scope of the classroom teacher, the classroom teacher tends to view them with a less than positive attitude. If the classroom teacher exhibits a negative attitude toward the special education resource program, it is likely that this negative attitude will be evident to the special education student. Also, the chances are high that those same students will view the negative attitudes as being directed toward them rather than toward the program.

Recently attention has been given the attitudes of teachers toward special education programs. Upon review of the studies conducted one discovers that further investigation of teachers attitudes toward special education programs is justified (Bradfield, Brown, Kaplan, Richert and Stannard 1973; Combs and Harper, 1967; Harasymiw and Horne, 1975; Higgs, 1975; Shotel, Iano and McGettigan, 1972).

Two professors at Memphis State University who were supervising student teachers found that even though student teachers began their teaching assignments with positive attitudes toward special education

resource programs, those attitudes soon became negative. Dietrich, an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, and Bond, an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, speculated that the student teachers were modeling what they perceived as appropriate attitudes being exhibited by their cooperating teachers (Dietrich & Bond, 1980). This led the authors into conducting a pilot survey of attitudes of area teachers toward the special education resource program (Bond and Dietrich, 1981). Based on their findings, Bond and Dietrich applied for and were granted a faculty research grant to survey teacher attitudes on a larger scale.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

If the special education resource program is to be a success, classroom teachers must exhibit positive attitudes toward it. If teachers have negative attitudes, those attitudes may be perceived by the special education student as being directed toward him rather than toward the special education program. In order to prepare regular classroom teachers to effectively interact with special education teachers, a knowledge of existing attitudes is important. Therefore, the present study was conducted to assess the attitudes of classroom teachers toward the special education resource program. In addition, it was also decided to try and determine if other factors interacted to influence those attitudes. Primarily, the survey was written to assess the attitude of the classroom teacher toward the special ed-

ucation resource program. In addition, the survey sought to determine if the following factors were related to the teacher's attitude toward the special education resource program:

1. number of years in the teaching profession
2. teacher's level of education
3. number of special education courses taken
4. class size
5. number of special education students in the class
6. attitude toward those special education students
7. size of the school
8. location of the school
9. grade level taught

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Population

The three states of Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi were chosen for the study population and a sample of 300 public schools was selected from this population for the study. These three states were chosen because of the proximity of Memphis State University, located in Tennessee, to the borders of the other two states. Moreover, the initial research which led to this study involved students and teachers who had either been enrolled at Memphis State or lived in one of the adjoining states.

Sample

A directory containing a list of all the public schools was obtained from each of the three state Departments of Education. Using a microcomputer a random number generator was used to randomly select 100 schools from each of the three states. Schools included had to contain grades kindergarten through eight and have at least ten classroom teachers employed at the school.

A packet was made for each of the 300 schools. Contained in the packet was a cover letter to the building principal or supervisor, ten letters to the teachers, ten attitude surveys, and ten return envelopes. The cover letter to the building principal or supervisor explained the study being conducted. The letter requested that the principal or supervisor hand out to ten teachers: an attitude survey; a letter of explanation; and a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

The teachers were directed, by letter, to complete the survey and return it in the accompanying self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Of the three thousand surveys mailed 1263 were returned. Of the 1263 returned 1232 were tabulated for inclusion in the study. Thirty one surveys were excluded for the following reasons: 1) arriving too late; 2) more than two questions not answered; or 3) were completed by school personnel other than teachers.

Of the 1232 respondents included in the study 325 were from Arkansas, 333 were from Mississippi, and 439 were from Tennessee. One hundred

thirty five of the envelopes came through without postmark and the state of origin could not be determined.

The mean number years of teaching experience for the 1232 respondents was 11.9. For 60 percent of the teachers their highest earned degree was a baccalaureate. Over 70 percent reported that they had special education students in their regular classrooms and yet only 47 percent reported that they had ever had a special education class.

Instrument

The attitude survey used in this study was a refined version of the one the authors wrote for their pilot study. The major differences being: 1) increasing the number of questions designed to obtain demographic data; 2) using a 5-point rating scale rather than the 2-point scale; 3) adding additional survey questions; and 4) the rewording of questions on which the response from the pilot study was either 100 percent favorable or unfavorable (Apperdix A).

Crombach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the revised survey. A reliability coefficient of .69 was established.

The survey contained a 5 point scale. Respondents were asked to circle the indicator that best reflected their feelings toward each statement. Weights were assigned based on whether each statement was a positive statement or a negative statement. Total scores could range from 30 to 150. The higher the score the more positive the attitude toward the special education resource program.

DATA ANALYSES

All of the data collected with this survey were analyzed with Pearson product-moment correlation, t-test, or analysis of variance.

Table 1 presents the mean attitude scores for the entire population. In analyzing the data Bond and Dietrich designated that scores below 106 as indicative of negative attitudes toward the special education resource program. In order to score at 106 or below the respondents had to indicate less than positive views on 30 per cent of the items. Of the total population over 24 percent scored in that range. Those who scored less than 112 (the mean was 111.023) were less than positive on over 25 per cent of the items. Over 51 per cent fell within this range. Bond and Dietrich believe that these data indicate that there may be many teachers serving in our schools with rather negative attitudes toward special education resource programs.

Table 1
Mean Attitude Scores for Total Sample

n	Mean	sd	Range
1232	111.023	8.817	79-143

Bond and Dietrich found that there was a significant correlation between the teachers' attitudes toward the special education resource program and their attitudes toward special education students. The survey included six questions directed toward the views of the classroom teacher toward the mainstreamed special education student. The data collected for those six questions were analyzed with the Pearson product-moment correlation. The computed coefficient was .562/ ($p < .01$).

The authors also found significant relationships between the following factors and the special education resource program: 1) the number of years in the teaching field; 2) the number of special education children assigned to the classroom; 3) having had a special education course; and 4) the location of the school.

Pearson product-moment correlations were also computed for the number of years of teaching experience and number of special education students mainstreamed in the regular classroom with attitude toward the special education resource program. While neither of the correlation coefficients were high, $-.066$ and $.078$ respectively, they were both significant at the $.01$ level. The authors found it interesting that an increase in number of special education students was positively correlated with teachers' attitudes. However, just having special education students versus not having special education students was not a significant factor in teacher attitudes toward the special education resource program.

A t-test was used to analyze the effect of having had a special education course on the attitudes toward the special education resource program. With over 70 percent of the teachers reporting that they had special education children mainstreamed into their regular classrooms it is significant to find that those teachers who had taken at least one class in the special education field were more positive in their attitudes toward the program. The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

T-test of Means for Those Who Had A
Special Education Class and For Those Who Had Not

Source	Mean	sd	t
Had Class	112.3873	8.962	5.17*
Had Not	109.8040	8.507	

*significant at the .01 level

An analysis of variance was computed to analyze the data obtained relating to the location of the school and attitude toward the special education resource program. The F-ratio of 2.216 was found to be significant at the .05 level. Bond and Dietrich had speculated that the Mississippi teachers would have the highest scores on the attitude survey since few resource programs have been available in this state until recently. Therefore, it was thought that they would find the

special education resource program a positive addition to their regular educational program. However, the opposite was found. Urban Mississippi teachers had the lowest mean score while suburban Tennessee teachers had the highest mean scores. Table 3 presents the mean scores of the respondents by location. Table 4 presents the data obtained from the analysis of variance.

Table 3
Cell Means By State and Location

Source	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Arkansas	112.73	111.81	110.55
Mississippi	109.65	110.30	110.01
Tennessee	110.59	113.55	111.03

Table 4
Analysis of Variance of Mean Scores
By State and Location

Source	df	ms	F
Main effects by state and location	8	168.655	2.216*

*significant at .05 level

The remaining factors of grade level taught, teacher's level of education, and class size were not found to be significant factors relating to the attitude toward the special education resource program. The factor of grade level taught is not consistent with other studies of teacher attitudes toward special education resource programs which found more negative attitudes with increase in level of grade taught.

DISCUSSION

Bond and Dietrich found that over 20 percent of the attitudes toward the special education resource programs as measured by their survey were negative. They found that those teachers who had the more negative attitudes also had negative attitudes toward the special education student. Other factors which were significantly related to attitude toward special education resource programs were having had a special education class, number of years teaching experience, number of special education students mainstreamed into the classroom, and location of the school.

Taking these findings into consideration Bond and Dietrich believe it is essential to require at least one special education class at the undergraduate level for teacher certification. Furthermore, they believe that a graduate level special education course should be required for all graduate degree programs in education. Consideration should be given to course work designed to promote an understanding of and acceptance toward those children with handicapping

conditions.

In view of the high mean scores of the Tennessee teachers one could speculate that the longer a program is in existence the more acceptable it becomes. Tennessee has been a leader in passing educational regulations designed to insure that all children are provided with appropriate education. Criteria used for the writing of Tennessee's Law, Responsibility for Regular and Special Education (Tennessee Annotated Code), were established by the Council for Exceptional Children. This law was used as a model for PL 94-142. However, the decision makers in Colleges of Education cannot sit back and wait for teachers to decide to accept the special education resource program. We must actively work toward pre-service and inservice programs designed to foster positive attitudes toward both special education students and those programs designed to help them learn.

Appendix A

SECTION 1: TEACHER BACKGROUND

1. What grade do you teach? _____
2. How many students are enrolled in your class? _____
3. Do you have any special education resource children in your class? _____
If so, how many special education resource children do you have? _____
4. Approximately how many students are enrolled in your school? _____
5. Do you teach in an urban, suburban, or rural school? _____
6. Which of the following degrees do you have?
_____ Bachelors _____ Masters _____ Doctorate
7. Have you taken hours past that degree? _____ If so, how many? _____
8. Have you ever taken a special education class? _____ If so, how many? _____
9. How many years have you been teaching? _____

SECTION TWO: TEACHER OPINIONS

There are no correct answers to the following statements. Please circle the number under the column that best reflects your feelings toward each statement.

Scale: SA = Strongly Agree D = Disagree
A = Agree SD = Strongly Disagree
U = Undecided

	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. When requested by the classroom teacher, the resource teacher has the responsibility to provide appropriate materials for the special education student to use when he is in the regular classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Special education students benefit from being mainstreamed into the regular classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
3. There should be continual communication between the resource teacher and the classroom teacher concerning the mainstreamed students.	1	2	3	4	5

	SA	A	U	D	SD
	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is the responsibility of the resource teacher to define those academic skills which the special education student can perform in the regular classroom.					
5. It is the sole responsibility of the regular classroom teacher to assign report card grades to the resource student in her class.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The resource teacher and the classroom teacher should work together to insure that the special student is socially accepted by the students in the regular classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
7. It is the joint responsibility of the classroom teacher and the resource teacher to provide a schedule that best fits the needs of the special education student.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Regular classroom students do not learn as well when special education students are mainstreamed into their classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
9. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to inform the resource teacher when tests or new concepts will be presented so that pre-teaching may be initiated.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The classroom teacher should assume the responsibility to insure that the special education student is socially accepted by the students in the regular classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Special education students are usually disruptive while in the regular classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Special education students should be expected to complete the same assignments as the other students in the regular classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Presenting academic skills in the resource room which are also being taught in the regular classroom, gives the resource student an unfair advantage over the remainder of the students in the class.	1	2	3	4	5

	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. It is the responsibility of the resource teacher to interpret for the classroom teacher the IEP's of the special education student.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Having special education students in the classroom on a part time basis creates additional work for the classroom teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
16. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to initiate a discussion with the resource teacher concerning the special education student's academic progress.	1	2	3	4	5
17. It is the responsibility of the resource teacher to work around the schedule of the classroom teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
18. The academic progress of the mainstreamed special education student is the joint concern of the regular classroom teacher and the resource teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Classroom teachers should be fully aware of what their special education students are doing in the resource classes.	1	2	3	4	5
20. The resource teacher has the responsibility for identifying the academic weaknesses of the special education student.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Special education students are usually orderly while in the resource room.	1	2	3	4	5
22. The report card grades for the resource student should be determined jointly by the resource teacher and the classroom teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Special education students would learn more if they were placed in a self contained special education class.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Special education students tend to be quiet and withdrawn in the regular classroom.	1	2	3	4	5

	SA	A	U	D	SD
25. Special education students are included in non-academic activities by their normal classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Regular classroom teachers are adequately trained at the college level to teach special education students in their classes.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Special education students could make more academic progress if they remained in the regular classroom all day long.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Most special education resource teachers are open and friendly.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Most special education resource teachers are willing to help the classroom teacher deal with the special education child.	1	2	3	4	5
30. The average classroom teacher should not be expected to teach a special education resource student.	1	2	3	4	5

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